

Unbroken

A Senior Honors Thesis

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by

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A line can be defined as a dot taking a walk across a page. I find that the line can be pulled straight off of the paper and continue without the physical support of the 2-dimensional page.

I am fascinated by the works of Andy Goldsworthy, particularly his rivers, which are meandering lines twisting back and forth through nature and the landscape. In my own work, I have explored the use of string as line. The knitted form reproduces that same meandering line I had become infatuated with in the works of Goldsworthy. When looking at my knitted works, one must view the works up close to observe this weaving line. When viewed from a distance, horizontal lines occur where each row connects with the next. Through my investigations of the knitted form, I have created countless knitted drawings, which still remain on the 2-dimensional plane, just lacking the structure of the page.

For the past three quarters, I have been working on this research project, which began as a proposal to knit a wall, a physical barrier between the audience and the gallery wall. Throughout the months that I prepared for this project and during the five months I spent knitting *Unbroken*, many other things became factors of my research. One factor was with the increase of size, came the increase of weight. Gravity began to have a greater role in the display of the knitted form. Another factor was the issue of finding the appropriate size of knitting needle and the gauge of thread. Having a thicker needle, with a thin thread creates larger holes in the looping of the line. I chose to use US size 19 needles (16.0 mm) and size 10 crochet thread to create the wall.

Prior to this research project, I had been creating unconventional knitted forms, without a recognizable shape, on a much smaller scale, never exceeding 24 x24 inches. There was always a relationship to the body through clothing, regardless of the fact that these forms were non-functional. I was interested in the change of associations to the knitted form, when the form became larger than the body.

The final presentation of *Unbroken* contains the knitted "wall", roughly 14'x 8', a wooden rod supporting the knitting and five white brackets. This hold the knitted form about 6 inches away from the wall. The space between the wall and knitted form was initially to allow for shadow play. I was interested in the concept of shadow creating a drawn line without the act of drawing a line. Seeing this piece in its final state, I find that the shadow play is much different than I had anticipated. Instead of being able to decipher each shadow as a line drawn by light, it creates hazy shapes of shadows. I found this to be even more intriguing than I had anticipated. The hazy shapes, or fields of shadow, seem to be vertical in nature, which in some ways is contradictory to what one would expect. The knitting creates rhythmic horizontal lines with each row it connects to, above or below it.

I have also been investigating the concepts of line. Line also exists when two or more shapes come together, creating the contour of those shapes. For me, it is interesting how the line of the string, when knitted to create an intricate pattern, can cast a shadow, which transforms the line into shape.

Unbroken was created to be displayed in a gallery space of completely white walls and the knitted form to occupy the length and width of an entire wall. This is how I presented it in Hopkins Hall room 443. I feel that the white room is vital to the presentation. The wall behind the knitting offers a support structure. It creates a reference for the knitted object to embody architectural qualities; like becoming a wall, or a column. The use of white walls allows for the subtle contrast of the off-white color of the string. Also, the shadow play creates an amazing combinations of colors on the white wall, which can be seen through the holes of the knitting, or when viewed from the side, to observe the space between the architectural wall and the knitted wall.

For part of my research, I created knitted drawings to explore what materials and scale of knitting needles was appropriate. One of those drawings became a separate piece called *fragments. unfinished*. This piece was on a larger scale, measuring roughly 8' x 5.5'. It developed into a counter piece for my research. *Fragments. unfinished* was knit in a way that allowed for it to appear unfinished, or decaying and torn away. It has large holes throughout it and is irregularly shaped. This contrasts the wall I was knitting, *Unbroken*, which is a solid rectangle with no intentional interruptions in the rhythm of the knitting. When one looks at *fragments. unfinished*, they are much more aware of the edge of the knitting, in comparison to the wholeness of *Unbroken*. With the knitted wall, the two vertical edges are slightly sloping, but create a sharp frame. The bottom edge appears to be ragged and tattered with some strings extending beyond the boundary of the knitting. Having the bottom edge more

irregular, forces the viewer to acknowledge something, which is much lower than their eye level, and draws attention to the moments where the knitting touches or rests on the floor.

The element of time and process became a large part of my research. It took approximately 190 hours devoted to just to knitting. The act of knitting forces the body to pace itself. It sets a rhythm as the needles click in a constant manner. When knitting, your fingers race as a motion to hasten the speed of the knitting, yet the act compels a continuous tempo. I found that this was a lesson on how to view life. Many times we, as humans, are always in a rush, striving for instant gratification. Sometimes we need to slow down and become present in the moment.

I have spoken with a few people who have viewed *Unbroken* in its final state. I question some of the associations that come to their minds when viewing it. One said, with the space between the wall and knitting, “its like a tunnel into a magical world. I want to get there but just can’t make it.” Others have made connections to a curtain or veil, like an article of clothing for the room to wear, an architectural garment. Another association was to a waterfall of string descending from the ceiling. There are some associations and qualities that I want to be apparent to the viewer. Particularly, I want the viewer to be aware of the element of time. I feel that this piece requires a good portion of time to be properly viewed. I also hope that the viewer will associate this knitted form with architecture. One of my concerns is that with the overall shape being a rectangle, I want to avoid the association of the knitted form

being merely a decorative curtain that would have been mass produced to be hung over a window. As I continue to display the knitted wall, I continue to question viewers on their associations with the piece.

Through the process of hanging *Unbroken*, I feel I have come to a better understanding of some the endless possibilities and properties of this practice that knitting contains. Things that I continue to question are the different ways that I should display the knitted form. Questions like; how important is the architectural wall to the piece? Or could the form be displayed on the floor either stretched out or displayed in a heap of string bundled together? Another consideration is how much space is needed if the piece is displayed vertically. In its final state, it was displayed at around 14 feet wide. This allowed for a considerable amount of spacing between the lines of the looping string. If it were to be displayed with less horizontal space, it would compact the spacing of the string, and create a change of opacity throughout the knitted wall. Overall this project has left me with a vast array of concepts of where to go from here.